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Memorandum for: Major Ernest Lane
JCS/J5/European Division
Pentagon

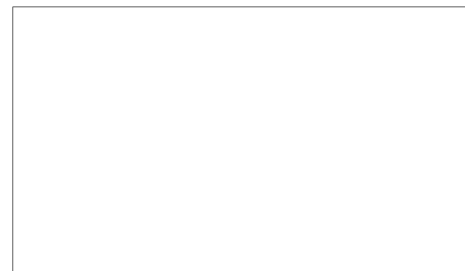
Dear Major Lane:

I have enclosed some shelf items on aspects of British policy and politics for background.

We did not have anything on Parliamentary Committees, so I drafted a short paper; I hope its what you need.

Please let me know if there is anything else we can do to help you.

Regards,



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Office of European Analysis

EUR M 85-10049

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

18 March 1985

MEMORANDUM

British Parliamentary Committees

There are two types of Committees in the House of Commons -- standing and select. Standing Committees, in contrast to their US counterparts, are ad hoc bodies set up to consider details of bills before Parliament. Standing committees, often composed of large sections of the Commons, play an important role in the course of legislation but have a minimal role in overseeing administration. [REDACTED] 25X1

Select Committees are smaller and have a relatively permanent membership; they are designed to reflect the political balance in the Commons, but opposition MPs often hold the chairmanship. The current Select Committees date from Parliamentary proposals in 1978, recommending that each government department be monitored by a Select Committee and that the Committees be given power to summon ministers and civil servants to testify. Some of these reforms were implemented by the Thatcher government in 1979, largely through the impetus of former Leader of the House of Commons, Norman St. John Stevas. Fourteen Select Committees were established to follow major Whitehall departments. Ministers are not required to come before the Committees, but they almost always agree to appear when requested. (Ironically, St. John Stevas was fired from the government in 1981 over disagreements with Thatcher's economic policies; as a backbencher he continues to push for greater Parliamentary oversight, especially over spending in nationalized industries). [REDACTED] 25X1

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[REDACTED]
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Parliamentary Select Committees do not have the powers or resources of US Congressional Committees; their recommendations are not binding, but they have changed the way government does business in Britain. Their reports are taken seriously by both the government and the public; earlier this month, for example, a Select Committee report critical of energy pricing policy was in large measure responsible for Thatcher's decision to abolish at this time the British National Oil Company. [REDACTED]

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The Public Accounts Subcommittee, which has substantial influence over the budget, is probably the most important body, but the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees are acquiring considerable influence. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee in particular have over the past year engaged in a number of foreign trips in order to obtain information for policy recommendations. The Committee has not hesitated to question policy; a report last spring critical of Thatcher's stand during the Grenada invasion, for example, probably nettled the Prime Minister. [REDACTED]

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The Select Committee on Defense can also be influential in how the government sets priorities and deals with budget problems. The Committee's Tory majority has thus far supported the Trident program, but it is clear that many Tories have doubts about the expense. Committee members have been especially dubious about the inability of Defense spokesman to give a "final" cost figure. Should the Defense Committee issue a report critical of Trident, the government would be seriously embarrassed over its nuclear modernization program. [REDACTED]

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The House of Commons Select Committee on Defense -- Some Observations

Membership (as of March 1984)

	Conservative	Labor
Sir Humphrey Atkins, Chairman	X	
Winston Churchill	X	
Dick Douglas		X
Bruce George		X
John Gilbert		X
Edward Leigh	X	
Ken Maginnis - Official Unionist (North Ireland)		
Michael Marshall	X	
Michael Mates	X	
Keith Speed	X	
Neil Thorne	X	

The Defense Committee's membership, in our judgment, does not carry the same clout as the Foreign Affairs Committee. It does, however, have some notable members. Sir Humphrey Atkins, the Chairman, served Thatcher loyally for three years in the thankless post of Northern Ireland Secretary. He was rewarded by a post at the Foreign Office, but resigned with Lord Carrington during the early days of the Falklands crisis. We would expect him to support the government's policies. Winston Churchill, grandson of Sir Winston, considers himself an expert on defense matters; he published in 1982 The Defense of the West, a work critical of various aspects of British policy. Churchill is a rightwing Tory who has at times angered Prime Minister Thatcher. Keith Speed is another notable Conservative member of the Committee; until 1982 he was the minister supervising the Royal Navy. He was fired for refusing to go along with proposed reductions in the number of surface vessels, a plan designed to help pay for Trident. Speed carries

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weight with right wing backbenchers, and will watch warily for the effect Trident has on other defense plans. We expect the government to work hard in retaining his support. We believe Bruce George is the most articulate Labor member on defense matters. George would probably be a strong candidate for a defense post in a Labor government, but the party may have moved too far to the left for him to be considered. George is not in sympathy with Labor's stand on unilateral nuclear disarmament, fears a Labor government would cut defense across the board despite claims of enhanced conventional forces, and off-the-record told a US audience he does not believe Labor can win the next election with its current platform. George believes Thatcher will face a spending crunch on defense in the next few years; he would like to cut Trident but has told US observers that Thatcher will instead "cheese pare" all programs to avoid any major policy choices. 25X1

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